

Testimony of Amy Astin
Director of Advocacy for Benefis Healthcare
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Joint Subcommittee on Education:
HB 02

My name is Amy Astin. I am here today representing Benefis Healthcare, and I thank you for the opportunity to testify on the matter of higher education in our state, and particularly with regard to funding for MSU-Great Falls.

Allow me to begin by telling you a little bit about my employer. Benefis Healthcare operates 502 licensed beds on two campuses in Great Falls. We are a faith-based, not-for-profit, locally-governed hospital. We are also the largest community hospital in Montana, serving approximately 225,000 residents within a 45,000 square mile region.

Benefis is the leading private sector employer in Great Falls and provides approximately 2,400 jobs. According to a UofM study, the medical sector represents 20% of the Great Falls economy -- and Benefis Healthcare comprises a large part of that percentage.

Like other businesses in Great Falls, Benefis holds the work of MSU-Great Falls in very high regard. The leadership at MSU-Great Falls deserves commendation for the extent to which it listens to and accommodates the needs of employers. Because MSU-Great Falls is so responsive to employers, the resulting curriculum is tailor-made for our market. This yields the trained personnel businesses in our region actually need.

MSU-Great Falls has been a valuable partner to Benefis, providing our hospital with a wide range of trained personnel -- from nurses to rad techs to physical therapist assistants. They turn out surgical techs, coders, and respiratory care. This school produces employees that keep our hospital running.

MSU-Great Falls has also demonstrated excellence in identifying innovative solutions to problems -- and has gone to great lengths to overcome barriers to training. One example is the use of interactive video to bring coursework to hospital employees in White Sulphur Springs, Choteau, and other communities, so these employees can receive training without driving to Great Falls.

Although I speak for Benefis because we need the trained personnel MSU-Great Falls provides to meet our mission, it is clear this school is doing great things for the region. Funding is critical in these current endeavors, however, and to ensure that MSU-Great Falls will continue to expand its contributions to our workforce and economy. Please ensure MSU-Great Falls receives the funding it needs to fulfill its mission.

Thank you.